

## Opinions

### Diesel-school funds rev up economy

**Our view:** Training for diesel truck mechanics will provide good jobs, keep economy humming.

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San Bernardino County's Workforce Investment Board's decision to invest in the training of diesel truck mechanics is a good bet to pay dividends.

It certainly pays off for the students, 20 of whom are getting \$1,000 from the Workforce Investment Board to pay for tuition, books and tools for San Bernardino Valley College's vocational education center on the grounds of San Bernardino International Airport.

Those who make it through the college's fleet maintenance program will be ready for a well-paid career in an industry with high demand for workers. They can expect to start at about \$15 an hour; one student expects to start at \$27 an hour once he earns his master technician certification.

And these are jobs that will be good for the long haul. Truck mechanic is not the sort of career that can be off-shored - the work has to take place where the truck is, so job security is above average.

The program is good for Valley College in that the Workforce Investment Board scholarships have helped to fill up the fleet maintenance classes and give the program some critical mass. Instructor Dan Hook said the enrollment this semester is among the highest he's seen.

This kind of vocational education for which we think there is a burgeoning need. "The high schools have forgotten the term 'craftsman,'" Hook said. "They've forgotten to tell the students that there's honor in being a craftsman."

We hope that is changing. Certainly there are more politicians, including Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, talking about the value of vocational education - now known by the updated term "career-tech education" - and that is a good trend.

This program is certain to pay off for a large number of local businesses and, hence, for the local economy overall.

Logistics and freight transportation are big sectors of the Inland Empire economy and getting bigger every day. Keeping goods moving requires well-maintained trucks, which in turn require well-trained mechanics.

"We looked at business owners to see what their needs are," said Phil Cothran, chairman of WIB's business-relations committee. "First on the table was the diesel mechanic. They have a lot of job openings. We don't mind putting our resources behind that to make that happen."

Mike Siebert, maintenance director for Apex Bulk Commodities Inc. in Fontana and Adelanto and a member of the college's diesel truck technology course advisory committee, agreed that trucking companies will hire increasing numbers of fleet-maintenance workers. One mechanic is needed to keep every 10-15 trucks on the road, he said.

As one student said, "Without trucks, America stops - that's all there is to it." That's what makes the Workforce Investment Board's modest investment a wise one.